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ABSTRACT

Central to this paper is the belief that the principal value of classical studies is that they are the foundation for a liberal education. The author proposes that the whole of the Graeco-Roman civilization be included in the development of the curriculum while urging interdisciplinary studies wherever possible. Commentary focuses on teaching methodology, student composition, literary criticism, and student attitudes. The need for reevaluation of the curriculum and for educational change in classical studies is also discussed. (RL)

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A theory of classical education IV

J. P. SULLIVAN

et nos ergo manum ferulae subduximus

At the time of the revival of literature, no man could, without great and painful labour, acquire an accurate and elegant knowledge of the ancient languages. And, unfortunately, those grammatical and philological studies, without which it was impossible to understand the great works of Athenian and Roman genius, have a tendency to contract the views and deaden the sensibility of those who follow them with great assiduity.

LORD MACAULAY

Classical literature and classical civilization are, I believe, both worthy of study in themselves and capable of providing an academic discipline which, given adequate teaching, may even end in a liberal education. They therefore deserve, and can successfully fight for, a place in school and university. Strangely enough, they continue to have their muted appeal 'to the imagination of the public', a fact which may be confirmed by a glance at the unexpectedly large number of popular translations of classical authors and the handbooks (generally bad) on classical antiquity which fill the bookshops. Classics should therefore be able to compete in cultural interest, as they do in academic values, with other subjects for the attention of suitable pupils.[1]

Certain aspects of classics happen also to be indispensable prerequisites for other humanistic studies, most notably those concerned with medieval culture and Renaissance literature. From a more modern point of view Graeco-Roman civilization offers a possible area of study for the cultural anthropologist, the comparative sociologist and various other scientists. Here it

[1]Professor Sullivan's notes are to be found at the end of his article–Editor.

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becomes an object of scientific study; and its possibilities in this rôle are not germane to a theory of specifically classical education, although classical studies might very easily profit from a receptivity to more modern ways of analysing phenomena. With the scientist, however, it is not encouragement but cooperation that will be required from us and, whatever our incidental profit, I should be sorry if, in the interests of modernization, we were to set ourselves up as practitioners of some sort of science. To advertise our studies as the sort of knowledge of itself that the human race now wants, that is, an essentially scientific knowledge (if I understand correctly what is implicit in Dr Bolgar's advice), would be to lose sight of their traditional claim to be, and their true potential of being, a liberal and humane education. Indeed part of the trouble with the present practice of classics is that it is too 'scientific' and 'technical' already – and not much else.

Having ventured this mild disagreement with part of Dr Bolgar's solution to the present crisis, I must go on to agree with him in his black account of the current state of classical studies and not with Mr Kenney's rather defensive reply. It is not to Mr Kenney's statement of the ideal of a classical education that one must address oneself, but to the assumptions and theory that can be deduced from what is actually going on in the world of academic classics. For this one must direct oneself to the curricula, teaching methods and examinations in the schools and universities, to the directives and manifestos of teachers and examiners, to the reviews and writings of conventionally reputable scholars, to the encouragement or discouragement given to various kinds of research and publication, to the academic status and reputation accorded to those working in different areas of classical endeavour, and, above all, to the conventional verdicts on who is 'sound' and who is not. The picture to me is as sombre as Dr Bolgar paints it, and I find no comfort in Mr Kenney's distinction between what classical scholarship ought to be and what 'its incompetent (*sic*) representatives' make it appear to be: the important question is what it *is* at the moment. Given his ideal of classical scholarship and the obvious defection from its spirit

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among classical practitioners, I am surprised at his micawberism. I do not feel that our present mood of self-criticism is at all unjustified; I am more alarmed by the slow or adverse reaction to it and by the lack of concrete measures taken in response.

To be against accuracy and a sound knowledge of Latin and Greek is rather like being against God, country and motherhood. No critic of present-day classical education is against either of these, although he may seem more liberal in preferring a lively and personal reaction to classical literature and civilization to a highly-trained but fundamentally uneducated linguistic capacity that shows itself best in compositions. No doubt the old methods of training, which supposed that proficiency in the two languages was an end in itself, did produce (and still do) by a painful and highly uneconomic process students who are, in the conventional and therefore minimal sense, 'well-trained'. But the old methods stopped there, often leaving pupils with an exaggerated notion of their educational level, along with a suspicion, if not a downright hatred, of any literary culture that did not conform to the ideas they had unconsciously imbibed about *form*, *beauty*, *classical elegance* and the rest. Classicists have a bad record, for example, in their resistance to modern movements in literature or thought, although it would be a brave or obtuse classicist who now seriously offered *The Shropshire Lad* or Rupert Brooke as the last monuments of good English literature before it was overwhelmed by the ugliness of Eliot, Pound and their successors, or who approached Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy* in the spirit of Wilamowitz.

Obviously any substitute for our older uneconomic methods of training will demand as high a degree of linguistic capacity as is attainable; but in replacing as its aim the older ideas of purely linguistic accuracy with a wider notion of accurate perception and correlated response to reading, it should be faster, more efficient and quite ruthless in eliminating what does not serve its purposes.

To come to practicalities, a case can be made for prose composition at the earlier stages as a tolerably effective way of learning

basic grammar and acquiring some elementary notion of a standard Latin prose style; but, although I am pleased to see that Mr Kenney does not think that advanced composition for the majority is of much help, I would go further and say that even for those who showed a good capacity for composition it might very well be pernicious in the literary ideas it can give rise to. Verse composition in particular is of no critical use at all; it encourages a false notion of poetry, much as imitations of Chaucer in *Punch*, if taken at all seriously, might radically misrepresent that poet's work. Consequently, although every man is entitled to choose what hobby he wishes, verse composition should go from the curriculum, for, as a way of learning the mechanics of classical metre and the intricacies of poetical word-order and vocabulary, it is highly uneconomical. (I might add that I, like Mr Kenney, enjoyed composition at the university, but the feeling of achievement with which I would lay down my pen and, in the spirit of Housman's lexicographer, say to myself, 'Well done, thou good and faithful servant', was, I gradually realized, spurious and ill-founded.)

I would therefore take issue with both Mr Lee and Mr Bambrough on their arguments for composition (*Didaskalos* II, pp. 22-27). Mr Lee's argument for the simple forms of verse composition is that only after acquiring skill in writing hexameters will the rules of the hexameter become fully real to us. Are we then to extend this principle to the more complicated lyric and choral metres of Greek and Latin poetry? In my own opinion we have hexameter and elegiac composition in school because the rules are comparatively simple to master. If Mr Lee's utilitarian argument were valid we should be painfully mastering the metres of Roman comedy by translating *Gammer Gurton's Needle* into verse. The best and most economical way of mastering what few intricacies there are in the hexameter would be by cultivating the art of reading Latin poetry aloud with due attention to metre and sense. Significantly in English studies (as the recent *Didaskalos* conference on Literary Criticism in the Teaching of Classics brought out) the appreciation of English poetry is sharpened

apparently, not by original composition or re-Englishing in the manner of Pope, but by attentive and critical reading aloud, the act itself being regarded as a valuable form of criticism. I also believe that verse composition in particular encourages bad habits of verbal imprecision, because metrically appropriate words have to be preferred to exact translations, and impressively sounding phrases and rhetorical figures give a better impression of mastery than a true translation. On the same lines I would argue against Mr Bambrough that if 'compulsory composition makes schoolchildren and undergraduates read Latin and Greek with close attention', then this is the *wrong* sort of attention; it inculcates the attitude to reading that the parodist and the imitator have. This is adding to the price of drudgery the even higher price of bad reading habits.

Instead of composition some means must be devised which will not only increase steadily the student's linguistic capacity but also stimulate in him some critical thought about his texts. Extensive and rapid reading is therefore only part of the answer, for this can lead to superficiality unless there is something more to supply depth and inculcate rigour. Composition and, more plausibly, unseen translation were alleged to do this, but the first supplied the wrong sort of depth and inculcated something akin to *rigor mortis*. Instead I would suggest such means as the analytical dating of prose and verse passages, the stylistic and critical comparison of selected passages from important authors, even such exercises as might be constructed on the model of I. A. Richards's *Practical Criticism* (which is not to say that his critical principles should be adopted also). Such exercises can be made quite as rigorous and objective as composition, with the additional advantage that they have the right kind of rigour and encourage broader and more important abilities than the mere knowledge of the language. For this, of course, more imaginative textbooks will be needed in the training of the basic reading skills. Most Latin readers today emphasize variety and full representation of the range of Latin literature: no critical guidance is given to the student. Much better would be a careful

and critical choice of good literature in some bulk with proper introductions to each poet – and I envisage here something very different from what now passes as a suitable introduction in the school editions of individual authors. And such textbooks should be used to prove more than that the student can minimally 'understand', i.e. translate, the given passages.[2]

Another suggestion, obviously more suitable for the later stages of a classical curriculum, would be the critical comparison of Latin and Greek originals with the great English (or European) translations and adaptations. Obvious examples lie to hand, Catullus and Martial with Ben Jonson, Juvenal with Dryden and Johnson, even (*horribile dictu*!) Propertius with Ezra Pound. Mr Kenney pleads for a wider knowledge of English literature in classical students: I feel we should go beyond this and bring English literature into active contact with classical literature as a means of studying the latter. If a student is illiterate in the works of his own language, it will be difficult to give him any sort of liberal education in two literatures which are at first blush so alien to his experience.

Proceeding further along the classical curriculum and limiting myself to Oxbridge, I would like to expand some of Mr Kenney's suggestions and Dr Bolgar's strictures. The literary part of classical studies is, most will grant, the main source of our present discontent, and yet it is here that the first endeavours of the young student begin; and it is generally, and perhaps rightly, reckoned the centre of a classical education. I would say that, although detailed criticisms can be made, ancient history, archaeology, linguistics and similar studies are in fairly good shape at our older universities. There might perhaps be room for a greater flow of ideas from outside: modern anthropology, sociology, economics, political theory and contemporary history might be more widely and more stringently employed in their relevant areas, but there are already good and sometimes outstanding works to point to as proof of the receptivity of the non-literary branches of classical studies. The student of Münzer and the admirer of Syme can easily understand what Lewis Namier and

the Manchester school were doing in modern history. Even among our ancient philosophers some at least believe that a knowledge of, and an interest in, modern philosophy (that is, philosophy itself as opposed to the history of philosophy) need do no harm to their scholarly work, and the principle is academically enshrined in Oxford Greats. At least in these studies no *systematic* criticism seems called for (unless a plea for greater integration and co-operation be construed as criticism). The case is very different with our so-called literary studies. Having had experience of classics at both Oxford and Cambridge, I would say categorically that there is nothing in our subject that resembles a planned literary education which aims at turning out students of literature who are in the full sense educated. That educated men do emerge I would not deny, but this is surely *despite*, not because of, the curriculum. If credit is due to an institution, it is due to Oxbridge itself with its college system, its extracurricular activities and its general atmosphere of sophistication and culture.

To be even more specific: Dr Bolgar's point that 'the textual critics had won' is not to be shrugged off as an oversimplification. However complex the history of that victory, its fruits are still with us. If one looks at either Classical Honour Moderations in Oxford or section A of Part II of the Cambridge Tripos, one will see, despite all the deferential bows to literary history and criticism, the one set of skills which is stressed and looms largest for the aspiring student is textual criticism with its ancillary disciplines such as palaeography. I know from experience as a Moderator that in special book papers the final question (out of three), which may occasionally glance at such things as literary values, is conventionally allowed little time and is virtually ignored as a criterion of excellence; and the General Paper, where a critical sense might sometimes manifest itself, is far outweighed by the proportion of papers devoted to translation, composition and the more technical aspects of the classics. Naturally the lectures given in preparation for such tests are unlikely to evince respect for genuine literary criticism. These examinations institutionalize our attitudes to the study of classi-

cal literature, and I see little likelihood of substantial change in these attitudes – at least in Britain.

This pessimism is prompted by consideration of an even more damaging charge that one must make. It is generally agreed that our profession is most deficient in the specifically literary areas of our studies, and both Mr Kenney and Dr Bolgar stress the difficulties for teachers that any of our desirable reforms would entail. Neither however stresses enough the misunderstanding and suspicion, as well as the inertia and timorousness, which face any attempt at revolution. One of the difficulties felt by reformers is how to convince the suspicious not only of the desirability of the approach outlined above but also of its feasibility in our studies. The critical study of modern literature is well established as an academic discipline and a liberal education: one may point to its intelligent contributions to our literary culture. It is hard to point to similar things from the classical world: a handful of articles, one or two books – sometimes by amateurs – and that is all. And massed against those on the other side, sufficient at any rate to discredit the whole idea of intelligent criticism of classical literature, the complacent stock judgements or empty belletrism of popular histories of classical literature or the cheap paperback translations (with even cheaper introductions) of classical authors. There are no standards even among otherwise respectable classical scholars, and as a consequence bad pot-boilers are shrugged off as mere money-making or trivial by-products of more serious work. I have documented this elsewhere, and I would prefer now to make more concrete suggestions.

To begin with, before embarking on some commissioned *history* (not hand-book) of Latin or Greek literature, into which critical judgement of some sort is bound to enter, the classical scholar should be sure he has some conception of what literary criticism is. And here I must comment that I find the idea of literary criticism which can be gleaned from Mr Kenney's incidental remarks rather limited and jejune.[3] The task should be approached as work of the utmost seriousness. Indeed before the task can even be approached there should be a far more sympa-

thetic atmosphere to critical discussion in our studies, in our teaching and even in our classical societies, which at present generally limit themselves to more or less technical papers where discussion is rarely and hardly profitable. We should also show a far greater willingness to learn from other literary disciplines where critical standards have to some extent at least been established. If this entails perhaps that criticism of Greek drama has to go through the successive stages (or blind alleys) of a Rymer, a Johnson, a Bradley, a Dover Wilson, a Caroline Spurgeon, a Stoll and so on, then that is the penalty we pay for our isolationism in the past, and the pious hope is that ultimately the consensus of a growing critical community will separate out the good and the useful from the bad and the illusory. The more seriously the critical dialogue is taken, the sooner a fairly stable critical situation will emerge, with standards that may be appealed to even in disagreement. Criticism should be a vital activity, responsive to the needs and values of the present as well as the claims of the past – which is why I would welcome a closer contact with English literature in our studies. It should also call into play the assumptions and values of the whole man living in *this* civilization – and to condemn, say, areas of Martial and Juvenal as coarse and insensitive by the highest standards is not to be unhistorical. Similar considerations might be, but rarely are, evoked with Augustan literature.

From another point of view, these standards once established must be applied by reviewers with the utmost strictness to avoid the inevitable operation of a cultural Gresham's Law. Publishers should be discouraged in every way possible from reprinting old and worthless literary studies and histories in order to cash in on the present, perhaps rather modish, popularity of the classics. It must be made clear that even the most conventionally respected technical scholar will not be forgiven for the commercial production of inadequate criticism. In brief, criticism must be taken seriously and on the highest academic level in order for it to percolate down through the whole of classical education.

All this requires daring and also tolerance. To excel where standards of excellence are objective and obvious is easy; to work where learning, industry and mechanical intelligence will produce acceptable results is even easier – these are not the least of the attractions of textual criticism. To venture out into the hazardous regions of taste, imagination and thought; to offer arguments which although based on evidence may never be conclusive; to upset age-old evaluations and discount hand-me-down ideas, all of these offer no royal road to conventional success. Consequently most scholars have been reluctant to leave their safe concerns.[4] It is simpler to throw doubt on the reputability of the enterprises that are urgently required. Yet, unless all these attitudes change, the study of classical literature will continue to be what it is at present, mechanical, rigid and dehumanizing.

In conclusion, I would not have it thought that I am recommending that classics be centred on literary criticism exclusively, as my detailed recommendations above might seem to imply. I believe that the study of classics should be thought of as the study of the whole of Graeco-Roman civilization in all its aspects, and I believe that that study should be more integrated than it is now: *Literae Humaniores* at Oxford, for instance, is particularly prone to compartmentalization, if not to downright segregation by subjects. But, as I said earlier, the main source of our discontent lies in the way we teach and study literature, and in particular what one might describe as imaginative literature – Epic, Drama and Lyric. (It is much easier to find satisfactory treatments of the historians and the philosophers.) The fault lies in the hierarchy of talents which has been set up and which displaces what is fundamental in favour of what is peripheral. As a result, to both the student and the outsider, such studies as archaeology and ancient history seem to have a greater maturity of outlook and seem to produce work of much more fundamental importance. All I am pleading for now is parity of esteem for our literary studies.

NOTES

1 To take up an important point made by Dr Bolgar about the prestige of the classics, I might also add from my own experience that in Texas 35 per cent of the high school pupils that come to the University of Texas have had Latin to some extent, and that the enrolment in the Department of Classics has increased by 196.7 per cent between 1954 and 1963. (By comparison, the University as a whole has grown by merely 22.7 per cent.) No doubt having high school Latin encourages a student to continue his Latin studies through the *vis inertiae* which in England protects notably the position of classics at Oxbridge; but in view of the great freedom of choice given students and the consequent highly competitive nature of subjects at American universities, this increase can only be accounted for by something in classics which attracts, at least by its reputation, a great many students, even though they may never go further than a course in the classics in translation.

2 The textbooks and commentaries I would like to see for this régime would not be merely smaller and more dilute 'scholarly' commentaries. They would aim at giving the student critical guidance on how to read. There would be less emphasis on philological comment and much more on literary evaluation. There would be less straightforward adduction of parallel passages to illustrate linguistic usage and straight *wissenschaftlich* information and much more discursive critical comment. Furthermore the socio-historical background would take precedence over so-called *antiquities*.

3 He talks, for instance, of 'a combination of exact *applied* linguistic knowledge (which at the level of university studies merges into rigorous philological method) with humane and sympathetic appreciation' (why should it be *sympathetic*, one might ask, and not disinterested?); he pleads for 'the careful study of etymology, syntax, word-order, idiom, sentence structure, period, metre, figures of speech (so-called), and so on, not for their own sake but for their relevance to the interpretation of the texts being read and for their historical significance'. This

smothers a great many questions of principle. In particular, his view (to which I am diametrically opposed) that verse composition 'is a far more helpful critical exercise . . . than composition in prose' and that 'the exercise [of composition] does provide linguistic experience which it is difficult to imagine being achieved in any other way' seems to betray a linguistically oriented view of criticism. However, he takes all these implications back by advancing the proposition later (p. 11) that 'so far from aiding the appreciation of literature, composition, more often than not, actually inhibits or damages the literary and linguistic responses of all but the most naturally gifted by encouraging the delusion that one language can be satisfactorily interpreted in terms of another'. Consequently I am dubious about his assertion that 'an attempt to turn Milton or Swift into Greek or Latin can be a rewarding critical exercise'.

4 Again I must plead personal experience. Some time ago, when I was assembling contributors for two volumes of specifically critical essays on Roman literature, I bore in mind the general agreement best expressed by Mr Kenney himself that 'the editing of a classical text is a discipline that calls forth the widest possible range of knowledge and the richest possible combination of talents' and also the fact that there were hardly any students of Latin literature who thought of themselves as critics. I therefore approached a number of scholars who were, in one way or another, acknowledged experts on the standard authors I was interested in, or at least on their texts. I found a general unwillingness, more or less disguised, to be associated with such an enterprise, either because of a frankly avowed distrust of native ability in this area or because of the disreputability of the project. My experience as an editor of *Arion* has been much the same. For all the lip service paid to the idea of reform, literary criticism, etc., few are willing to leave their lasts to help.

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